

School Year 2015-2016

Maine Charter School Commission

ANNUAL REPORT TO THE COMMISSIONER

October 2016

Maine Charter School Commission

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Gina Post, Dir. of Program Management
Amy Allen, Administrative Assistant

Maine Public Charter Schools:

ACADIA Academy
12 Westminster Street
Lewiston, ME 04240
<http://www.acadiaacademy.org/>

Baxter Academy for Technology and Science
54 York Street, Portland 04101
www.Baxter-Academy.org

Cornville Regional Charter School
1192 West Ridge Road, Cornville 04976
www.CornvilleRegionalCharterSchool.org

Fiddlehead School of Arts and Science
25 Shaker Road, Gray 04039
www.FiddleheadsSchool.org

Harpswell Coastal Academy
9 Ash Point Road Harpswell 04079
www.HarpswellCoastalAcademy.org

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Burton M. Cross State Office Building
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Websites:

Maine Charter School Commission site
<http://www.maine.gov/csc>

Department of Education Charter Schools:
<http://maine.gov/doe/charterschools/index/html>

Maine Academy of Natural Sciences
16 Prescott Lane, Hinckley 04944
www.Means-gwh.org

Maine Connections Academy
75 John Robert's Road, Suite 11B
South Portland 04106
www.MaineConnectionsAcademy.com

Maine Virtual Academy
6 Chestnut Street, Augusta 04333
www.mainevirtual.org

Snow Pond Arts Academy
8 Goldenrod Road
Sidney, ME 04330
<http://www.snowpondartsacademy.org/>

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NOT YET COMPILED

Maine Charter School Commission

Annual Report to the Commissioner

2015 – 2016 School Year

October 2016

This Annual Report to the Commissioner is written to satisfy the requirement of MRSA Title 20-A, Chapter 112, §2405.4 Reporting and Evaluation, an authorizer shall submit to the commissioner an annual report within 90 days of the end of each school fiscal year summarizing:

- A. The authorizer's strategic vision for chartering and progress toward achieving that vision;
- B. The performance of all operating public charter schools overseen by the authorizer, according to the performance measures and expectations specified in the charter contracts;
- C. The status of the authorizer's public charter school portfolio of approved charter applications, identifying all public charter schools within that portfolio as: approved, but not yet open; operating; renewed; transferred; terminated; closed; or never opened;
- D. The oversight and services provided by the authorizer to the public charter schools under the authorizer's purview; and
- E. The total amount of funds collected from each public charter school the authorizer authorized pursuant to subsection 5, paragraph B and the costs incurred by the authorizer to oversee each public charter school.

A. The Maine Charter School Commission's strategic vision for chartering and progress toward achieving that vision:

Mission:

The mission of the Maine Charter School Commission (Commission) is to allow charter schools to be established as public schools that improve pupil learning by creating more high quality schools with high standards for pupil performance; that close achievement gaps between high-performing and low-performing groups of public school students; that increase high-quality educational opportunities within the public education system; that provide alternative learning environments for students who are not thriving in traditional school settings; that create new professional opportunities for teachers and other school personnel; that encourage the use of different, high-quality models of teaching and other aspects of schooling; and that provide students, parents, community members and local entities with expanded opportunities for involvement in the public education system.

This mission is being accomplished in a number of different ways. The Charter Commission has formally adopted Rule 90-668 Chapter 1: Commission Organization and Operation that guides how the Commission will organize and operate, Rule 90-668 Chapter 2: Procedures for Commission Authorization of Public Charter Schools, and Rule 90-668 Chapter 3: Procedures for Charter School Renewal. Chapter 3 was created to have a procedure established for the renewal process, which in 2016 has begun for two of the schools, Maine Academy for Natural Sciences and Cornville Regional Charter School.

Charter School Approval Process:

The charter school must submit a charter application for establishing a charter school as described in the Maine Charter School Commission's Request for Proposals.

After the receipt of a charter school application, the approval includes a four step process:

1. The first step is a completeness review. Applications judged not complete are returned to the sponsor for errors or omissions to be corrected within 5 days.
2. Those applications deemed to be complete then move to the second step, approval for continued review. A Review Team, comprised of three Commission members, assisted by technical experts, as needed, review each application and rate it using the evaluative criteria in the RFP. Using the scoring rubric as a tool, the Team develops a recommendation for consideration by the full Commission to determine merit for continued review.
3. The applicants approved for continued review then move to the third step which includes an interview with the Commission and a public hearing.
4. In the final step, the Commission reviews the findings from the review of the application, the information received from the interview and the public hearing and makes a decision to approve or deny the application.

A fifth round of RFPs, dated June 10, 2015, was completed in the spring of 2016 with the Commission approval of two new public charter schools, ACADIA Academy and Snow Pond Arts Academy. Maine students have the opportunity to choose to receive their education from nine public charter schools, each offering a different educational focus.

- ACADIA Academy serves grades K-2 (adding grades 3 and 4 in the coming school years) with a focus on direct instruction and hands-on learning;
- Cornville Regional Charter School serves grades K-8 with a focus on standards-based instruction;
- Maine Academy of Natural Sciences serves grades 9-12 with a focus on agriculture and forestry;
- Baxter Academy for Technology and Science serves grades 9-12 with a focus on science, technology, engineering, and math;
- Fiddlehead School of Arts and Sciences serves pre-K – 5 using the Emilia Reggio philosophy;
- Harpswell Coastal Academy serves grades 6-11 with a focus on project-based learning;
- Maine Connections Academy serves grades 7-12 through a virtual platform;
- Maine Virtual Academy serves grades 7-12 through a virtual platform;
- Snow Pond Arts Academy serves grades 9-12 with a focus on the performing arts.

RFPs were released again on May 31, 2016, with a receipt date of August 25, 2016. The Commission could approve one new school before reaching its legislated maximum of ten schools during the first ten years following the passage of 20-A MRSA, Chapter 112 (2012-2022).

Legislative Process:

In addition to its work managing the RFP process, authorizing of new charter schools, and overseeing all charter schools, the Commission was engaged in the legislative process. The Commission introduced the work of the Commission in implementing the law and meeting its authorization and monitoring responsibilities to legislators; monitored legislative proposals that might affect charter schools or amend the charter school law; provided testimony to assist the legislative committee as it considered proposed legislation and was available to address requests for

information. The Commission presented its budget to the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee.

Monitoring:

The Commission also maintained close communication with the approved charter schools and attended important functions at the charter schools. The Commission conducted the required monitoring responsibilities. These included pre-opening and ninety-day reviews with the newly opened school, as well as an extensive end-of-year review with each charter school.

As part of its conduct of business, the Commission reviews its processes and procedures for the purpose of improving them. The end-of-year monitoring process had been reviewed and improvements were implemented. These included a lengthier time line with more in-depth review of documentation by the Commission's review team. This resulted in additional review team meetings and correspondence with the schools. The Commission is confident that this has resulted in improved end-of-year reports.

Commission Activities:

In addition to monthly meetings (see calendar in appendix), Commission members were available to media representatives responding to inquiries, as well as contributing to a better public understanding of the charter school law and transparency of Commission activities. The Commission conducted a well-attended clinic on Maine's Charter School Law and public charter schools at the Maine School Management Association Annual Fall Conference, October, 2015.

The Commission was fully engaged in the development of rules and the rewriting of RFPs. Commission members maintained a record of excellent attendance at the Commission's regular monthly business meetings, workshops and also at all special meetings of the Commission. Each of these responsibilities required many hours of voluntary labor.

In October, 2015 three members of the Commission and two staff attended the National Association for Charter School Authorizer's annual conference in Denver, Colorado to attend workshops and sessions to assist in developing and maintaining policies and practices consistent with nationally recognized principles and professional standards for authorizing public charter schools.

Staff:

Supporting the Commission are three administrative employees, an Administrative Assistant, a Director of Program Management, and an Executive Director.

The Administrative Assistant provides preparation for meetings, notifications, agendas and minutes, and maintains the growing amount of records and correspondence of the Commission, and many other tasks.

The Director of Program Management assists the Commission with many tasks, which include: review of charter applications, analyzing and evaluating charter school academic performance, writing of monitoring reports, providing research and analysis, communicating with charter schools to strengthen their performance, providing feedback to schools regarding accountability metrics, reviewing schools' performance, and legal compliance.

The Executive Director assists the Commission on many levels, particularly in developing policies and procedures, serving as a liaison between the Commission and the Maine Department of Education, Legislature, and Attorney General's Office, providing research and analysis, monitoring charter contracts for compliance, managing Commission income and expenses, and working with the Commission throughout the charter application process.

Strategic Plan:

The Charter Commission annually reviews its work from the previous year for the purpose of continuous improvement of its efforts to oversee the public charter schools. This review results in the Commission's strategic plan for the following year.

The 2015-16 Maine Charter School Commission Strategic Plan was to enhance and refine its core business processes to better regulate Maine public charter schools and to help assure their educational and operational excellence. Under this plan, the MCSC addressed the following:

- Revise the application process to be more effective and manageable;
- Improve the effectiveness of the school monitoring process;
- Define and implement a process for development and management of the Commission's budget;
- Review existing Commission public documents and consider additional communication to the executive branch, legislature and public, that will provide information on the status of charter schools in Maine; and
- Consider changes to the form of charter school contract to clarify such areas as mechanisms for non-compliance and amendment processes.

Sub-Committees:

In addition to the work done by the full Commission, the Commission established 5 sub-committees. These sub-committees consisted of 3-4 commission members, and also included staff as appropriate.

- Budget
 - Establish process for reviewing budget
 - Consider future budget in light of Mission and Goals
 - Identify needs
- Monitoring
 - Evaluate effectiveness of schools' self-assessment for review and report
 - Review timetable
 - Identify essential Components
- Contract
 - Review for elements
 - Evaluate procedures regarding non-compliance
 - Review process for material/non-material Amendment
- Public Documents
 - Gather, edit, and create appropriate documents for various audiences
- Application
 - Consider a 2-phase application process
 - Review for essential components
 - Review timeline

B. The performance of all operating public charter schools overseen by the Maine Charter School Commission, according to the performance measures and expectations specified in the charter contracts:

The Charter Commission conducts a comprehensive Interim Monitoring Review visit to each public charter school within the first 90 days of the school's operation. During the 2015-16 school year one interim visit was conducted. A report was generated and approved by the Commission. (The interim report is included with this document).

A final year-end, Performance Monitoring Review was also conducted for each school. This included a presentation of the required data, as well as two visits to the public charter school with interviews, observations, and a post-visit review team meeting several weeks after the school visit to analyze complete end-of-year data. A report with findings was generated and accepted by the Commission. (This final report for each school is also included with this document.)

In general, the Commission is pleased with the performance of each school, the progress they have made, the excitement of the students and parents for the schools, the dedication and hard work of the schools' staff, the evidence of the creativity applied to the teaching and learning process, the adaptations of best practices being used in the schools and, most importantly, the Charter Commission appreciates the continuous work to improve upon the success that the students are achieving.

C. The status of the authorizer's public charter school portfolio of approved charter applications, identifying all public charter schools within that portfolio as:

(1) Approved:

- ACADIA Academy (September, 2016);
- Snow Pond Arts Academy (September, 2016)

(2) Operating:

- Baxter Academy for Technology and Science (September, 2013);
- Cornville Regional Charter School (October, 2012);
- Fiddlehead School of Arts and Science (September 2013);
- Harpswell Coastal Academy (September 2013);
- Maine Academy of Natural Sciences (October, 2012);
- Maine Connections Academy (September, 2014);
- Maine Virtual Academy (September, 2015);

(3) Renewed: Not Applicable

(4) Transferred: None

(5) Terminated: None

(6) Closed: None

(7) Never opened: None

D. The oversight and services provided by the Maine Charter School Commission to the public charter schools under the authorizer's purview:

The Charter Commission provides oversight of the authorized charter schools through end-of-year monitoring visits. Additionally, charter schools are required to provide information periodically during the year, as well as end-of-year data. (see calendar in appendix)

In the past year, the Commission made a pre-opening visit to Maine Virtual Academy (MEVA). Representing the Charter Commission was a team of three Charter Commission Members, assisted by a Department of Education Special Education team member, as well as the Charter Commission Executive Director and Director of Program Management. In general, the three-member teams of Charter Commission Members assigned to review an application continue to serve that public charter school conducting the monitoring and visits for compliance with the Contract, which include the Application, Pre-Opening plan, Monitoring Plan, Performance Indicators and Closure Plan.

The pre-opening visit included Governing Board Members and administration at which the school's contracted pre-opening plan was reviewed for completeness and authorization to open. (The pre-opening visit report is attached.)

During the first year of operation, the Commission Review Team administers a 90-day visit at the school. These half-day interim visits are held during the first ninety days of the opening of the school. For the 2015-16 school year only MEVA required a 90-day visit. The Team reviewed data provided by the school, toured the school and observed classes and activities; all to assess the school's progress in implementing their proposed educational and organizational plans. (The 90-day visit report for Maine Virtual Academy is attached.)

At the end of the school year, an annual on-site visit was conducted and an annual monitoring report was written. The Review Team measured progress on attainment of the charter school's Performance Indicators in the Charter School Contract.

The Charter Commission conducts periodic visits to the schools during the year, unannounced and scheduled, as well as email and telephone conferencing with school personnel. These are for the purpose of providing support to the schools, maintaining an awareness of the schools procedures and programs and responding to questions or need for information. As reports are received from the school during the year, they are reviewed and the records are retained.

Members of the Charter Commission were present at charter school events such as:

- occasional and planned visits to the charter schools during the school year;
- enrollment lotteries conducted by schools when enrollment declarations exceed the number of openings;
- pre-opening review at the Maine Virtual Academy charter school approved for opening in September, 2015;
- graduation ceremonies

The Chair of each school's review team maintained communication with each school throughout the year. The staff of the Charter Commission provided assistance to each school when requested and communicated information to assist their progress.

In addition to the oversight activities, the Charter Commission supported programs to assist the charter schools. Workshops included: Proficiency-based diploma, special education, certification, school security, transportation, and data collection.

In February, 2016 the Maine Charter School Commission scored 12 of 12 points on National Association of Charter School Authorizers' (NACSA) Index of Essential Practices. Each year,

NACSA releases the Index, its analysis of how well authorizers across the nation are implementing the 12 practices that are critical to fulfilling the responsibilities of being an authorizer. (The Letter of Recognition is attached.)

E. The total amount of funds collected from each public charter school the Maine Charter School Commission authorized and the costs incurred by the authorizer to oversee each public charter school.

By law, the Commission is allowed to receive 3% of annual per-pupil allocations received by each public charter school that it authorizes. These funds must be used to cover the costs for the Commission to oversee its public charter schools.

The 3% amount received from the resident school districts and from the DOE based on the EPS formula in FY 16 was \$443,195.52 of which a portion was used to pay the Commission per diem, fund professional development for the Commission and staff, engage professional and administrative staff, and to fund activities to oversee public charter schools. The balance has been carried into FY 2017.

Professional development of the Commission and staff is to assure that the Commission, in its operation, adheres faithfully to the requirement of the Public Charter School Law that authorizers meet nationally recognized principles and professional standards.

The Commission expended from its budget \$212,330 (The FY 2016 expenditure report is attached.) The monies expended were used to operate and staff an office that supports the operational and oversight activities of the Commission.

Also attached to this report are: FY16 year to date expenditures - other special revenue funds, FY16 expenditures by vendor -other special revenue funds, FY17 approved budget, FY17 budget guideline.

Maine Charter School Commission

Organization Chart 2015-2016

